

ALABAMAARTS

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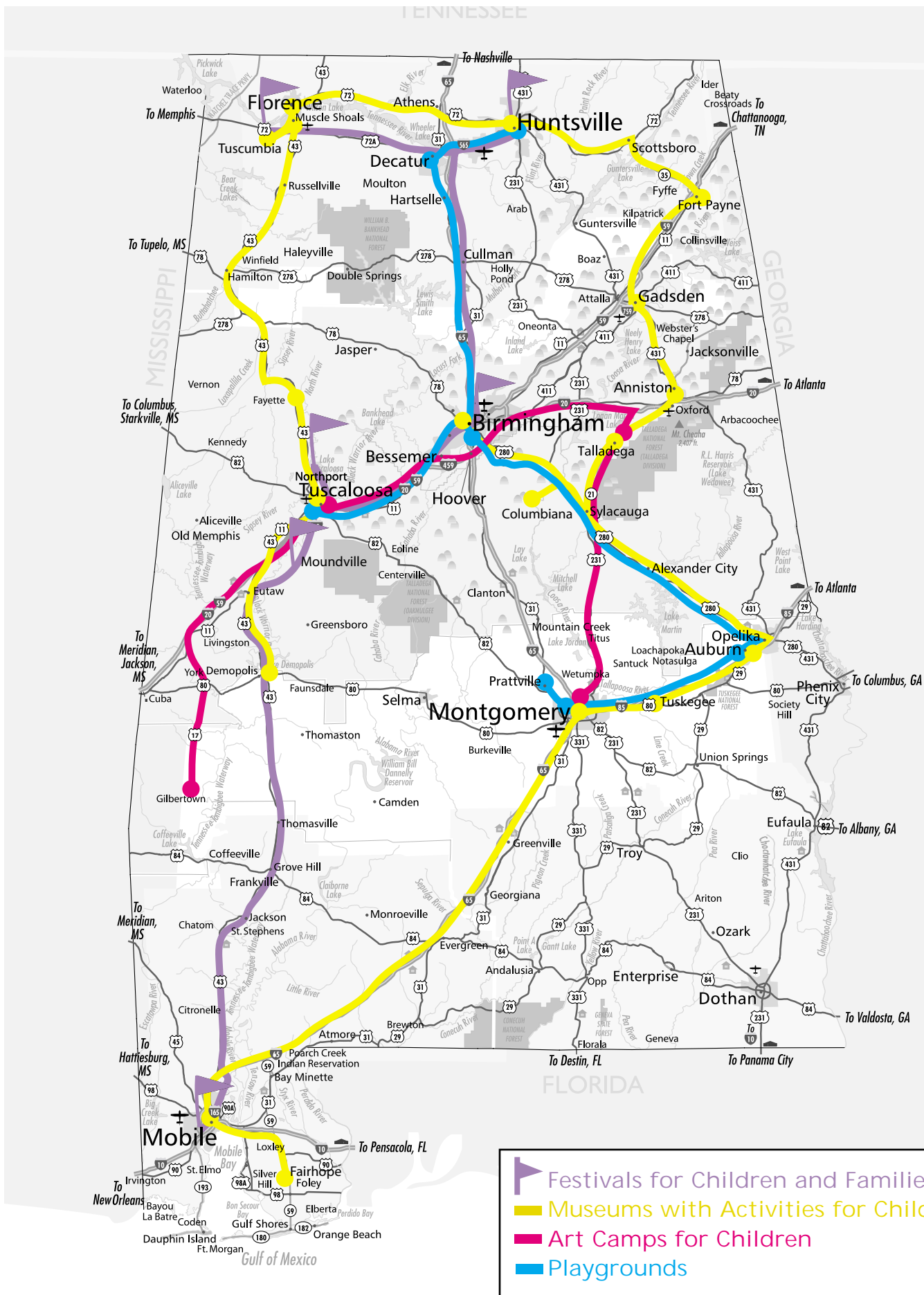
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On the cover: "Castles in the Sky" by Jim Gunter. Used with permission of the artist.

Jim Gunter is a professional artist with an extensive exhibition and award record. He has retired as head of the Arts Department and Visual Arts Instructor at Baldwin Arts and Academic Magnet School, Montgomery, and is currently art instructor at Saint James School, also in Montgomery. He works with pastel on paper. His work looks at the child's world of creativity through the adult perspective. He graciously allowed us to manipulate the piece so that it formed the shape of the State of Alabama.



ART *for the Young and Young at Heart*

by Al Head

How many times have we heard a successful person, whether a celebrity in the entertainment business, a community leader, a CEO of a big corporation or a public official talk about an influential person or event in their early life that inspired them to achieve great things? Obviously the answer is—more times than not. Inspiration for young people comes in many forms and at critical moments in the developmental process of one becoming a productive adult. Thus, providing and shaping “critical moments” is important for children. There are many examples and stories about the arts and artists of Alabama providing these “critical moments” for our young folks. This issue of Alabama Arts spotlights some of the programs, people and events throughout the state that provide these moments for our children. A trail of activity provides many opportunities for education, family fun and rich cultural experiences.

The amazed expressions of children at a production of the Birmingham Children's Theatre, the wide-eyes of boys and girls carving sand sculpture at the Kentuck Festival or the enthralled gaze of young students listening to an Alabama author reading tales about a ghost named Jeffery, are images hard to forget. These examples are but a few of the experiences occurring almost every day in Alabama involving artists and children. Performances, festivals, classes and exhibitions are designed to provide young people with a wide-range of opportunities stimulating their creativity and learning. Children learn, are inspired, and are reached in different ways. Some youngsters respond quickly to listening and seeing. For others, the light bulb goes on from having hands-on activities and through the act of doing. The arts can and do provide “magic moments” for all kinds of children in all kinds of ways.

In almost every community there are arts organizations that place a high priority on presenting programs for children. Also, an incredibly important component to audience development for arts groups is the ability to successfully reach out to families. It is no secret that one of the best formulas for building an audience is to involve children. When a child is involved in an arts program it is

not unrealistic to expect parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and members of the extended family to attend. Also, if a program attracts children, chances are parents and/or other adults will accompany them. On the other hand, if parents want to go to a festival or other arts event that happens to also have a component for their children, that is a winning combination for everyone. In all of these instances, our state is rich in family-oriented arts opportunities that are rewarding for everyone.

Hopefully the examples put forward in the text that follows will increase awareness of family-oriented arts opportunities, motivate broader audience participation in programs, encourage support (financial and volunteer) and provide ideas for new programming. Limited space allows only partial credit and attention to the long list of fine programs taking place in the state. There is really no valid excuse for not being able to find exciting family opportunities in the arts in Alabama. There are programs in communities, big and small, in the visual, performing and literary arts and activities for every age group. Even kids who think they have grown-up will find plenty to do. One can start by following the “trail” in Alabama Arts and continue the journey by keeping an eye-out for many other events taking place in all seasons of the year. Who knows, you may see a future governor of our state starring as Hamlet in a student production of ASF's Camp Shakespeare.

Please note, you can start preparing for the “Year of the Arts” scheduled for 2007, being promoted through the State Bureau of Tourism and Travel, by following the diverse “arts trails” being profiled by the State Council on the Arts in up-coming issues of Alabama Arts.

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Alabama Festivals: Community Celebrations

by Georgine Clarke

Alabama communities provide families with a huge variety of festival celebrations. Some are about food (blueberries, shrimp, crawfish, watermelons, potatoes, peanuts); some are about music (bluegrass, fiddling, dulcimers, chamber music, blues, gospel, jazz); and some are about heritage (farm days, pilgrimages, Kwanzaa). There's Mardi Gras and the Rattlesnake Rodeo, Selma Tale Tellin', International Festivals and Christmas on the River. They offer festive, diverse experiences for children—not to mention tasty barbeque and funnel cakes. Check the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel website (www.800alabama.com) for an extensive, updated list of community events.

Some Alabama festivals are dedicated uniquely to celebrating the arts or presenting cultural traditions.

They may provide juried art markets, with opportunities to purchase art directly from the artists. Visitors can watch and participate in a wide variety of art processes from pottery being turned on a wheel to blacksmithing, printmaking and quilting. These art and cultural festivals offer unique children's activities. Below is a sampling:

Panoply Arts Festival in Huntsville (April) offers an array of music, activities and programs for every age group. A unique part of the event is the Panoply Choreography Competition, which gives dancers the chance to participate in master classes and to showcase their work to festival audiences in the honorable mention and final round performances.

Regional performers are also on the schedule. Visitors can watch everything from children's theatre to orchestral performance to the Huntsville City Elementary Schools Festival Chorus. The Arts Demo Village offers

Panoply guests the opportunity to experience the artistic process as professional artists demonstrate their art forms and answer questions as they create artwork on site. Calligraphy, weaving, wood carving, portrait painting, mosaic art and pen and ink drawing are often featured. Hands-on activities, some with objects to take home are among the most popular children's experiences. These include using rubber stamps to create greeting cards, designing "crazy hats" with streamers and jewels, creating bracelets or key chains with colorful beads, and various painting and drawing activities.

The Helen Keller Festival in Tusculumbia (June) is a tribute to the life of Helen Keller, Alabama native who went on to become a great and effective spokesperson for deaf and blind causes. Keller Kids is a program



Artist demo tent, Panoply Festival, Huntsville.

Photo courtesy of The Arts Council, Huntsville



Photo courtesy of The Arts Council, Huntsville

Artist demonstrating unique sequential painting process at Panoply Festival, Huntsville.

for 100 pre-registered children in the 5th and 6th grades. The children participate in activities designed to help understand the everyday life of the blind and hearing impaired; and, have presented a song learned in sign language from the main stage at the Festival. Other related activities include performances of William Gibson's powerful drama, *The Miracle Worker*, at Ivy Green, birthplace of Helen Keller. The Helen Keller Festival Juried Fine Art and Craft Show provides several art

demonstration experiences for children.

The Imagination Festival, held during Magic City Art Connection in Birmingham (April), features over 30 interactive workshops in art, music, theatre and dance. The workshops bring professional artists to



Photo courtesy of the ONB Magic City Festival

A parade with costumes and banners, at the Imagination Festival, in conjunction with Magic City Art Connection, Birmingham.



Photo courtesy of the Tennessee Valley Art Center

Alan Burch, potter, teaches wheel-thrown pottery at the Helen Keller Festival in Tusculumbia.

work with the children in projects which often reference historical artists. Each year's activities are unique, but visitors can count on the most inventive opportunities. Some past examples have included building large scale sculpture, learning about film making by building sets and shooting a short movie scene with a professional film maker, and exploring sound as vibration and improvising short pieces of music with musical instruments made of bamboo and gourds. An in-depth program at Magic City Art Connection is the

Collector's Classroom, a unique opportunity to learn behind-the-scenes work which takes place in the artist's studio. Designed for adults and older children, visitors have had the opportunity to learn glass bead making, encaustic painting, wood-block relief and glass etching.

The Sidewalk Moving Picture Festival (September) is a weekend celebration of new, independent cinema on 7 screens in Birmingham's historic downtown Theatre District. A component of the event is the Children's Film Extravaganza. These films are quite short, some as short as two minutes, with an average around 10 minutes. Grade suggestions are given in the program for as young as PreK, with such titles as *The Wheels on the Bus* and *I Stink* (the story of the life of a New York City garbage truck). These creative film projects offer a stimulating approach, differing from major studio productions. Another compo-

Photo by Georgine Clarke



Lonnie Holley demonstrates his carving technique for Mahala Feinstein at the Kentuck Festival, Northport.

ment of the event is the showing of finalists in the Alabama Student Filmmaking Competition for grades 7-12. These short films (5 minutes or less) are devised around a theme. The Festival has created a useful publication titled, "So You Want to Make a Movie."

Kentuck Festival of the Arts in Northport (October) offers a juried artists' market with 300 participants as well as an opportunity to meet nationally renowned folk artists. Children can work with Lonnie

Holley (called by them the Sandman) to carve small sculptures from core sand. Young poets work with Charles Tortorici at his Hanging Word Garden, thoughts turned into works of art and swinging in the breeze. At the Musical Petting Zoo, volunteers from the Tuscaloosa Symphony Guild bring a variety of classical instruments from tubas to violins for children to toot and strum, learning how each instrument works. A long-standing tradition is the craft of making corn shuck dolls. Opportunities for learn-

ing about printing, bookbinding, wheel thrown pottery and quilting attract young visitors. One of the busiest areas is operated by the Sloss Furnaces Metal Arts Program. Visitors create low-relief metal sculptures with "scratch molds" and watch as molten iron comes from the furnace and is poured into their mold.

Presentation of Southeastern Indian culture draws visitors to the Moundville Native American Festival (October). Visitors get first-hand experience playing the game of stickball or making a shell bead or watching pottery being pit fired. Stone toolmakers demonstrate "flintknapping", the process of making spear and arrow points from rocks.

The Native American stage features dancers, storytellers and musicians.

From Argentina to Zimbabwe, the culture of about 60 countries is celebrated at the Mobile International Festival (November). The event features performers, cultural exhibits, an art gallery, and



A family carving scratch blocks for Sloss Furnaces' iron pour at the Kentuck Festival, Northport.

Photo courtesy of the Kentuck Festival

international foods. As visitors enter, they are issued a "passport" to be stamped at each country they visit. Watch as a performer plays a didgeridoo, a long wooden flute used by Australian aborigines for some 8,000 years or a dumbek, a drum from Pakistan. Listen to a classical guitarist perform traditional Russian and Ukrainian music or watch Les Statues Vivantes ("living statues") from France. Quichua Indians from Ecuador, Japanese drummers, a Mariachi band and a Panamanian Folkloric Dance Group are all a part of the experience.

Festivals: celebrations of community and life. There are many in Alabama. We've listed only a few to start your adventures.

Georgine Clarke is the Visual Arts Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts and director of the Alabama Artists Gallery.



Artmaking during the Flimp Festival at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts.

Photo courtesy of Montgomery of Fine Arts



Hands-on creativity at the Flimp Festival, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts.

Photo courtesy of Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

MUSEUM ART TRAILS IN ALABAMA

by Georgine Clarke and Miriam Fowler

Load up the family or friends for road trips to see art in Alabama museums—and in the process learn about Alabama past and present and see the state in a new way. Museums are institutions that collect, care for and exhibit materials with the goal of public education. Some objects are paintings or sculpture; others are decorative arts such as textiles, furniture and china; others reflect a variety of cultural traditions. Suggestions for your trips: you can choose to visit major art museums, or you can also look for art in history museums and in local collections housed in historic homes. Look for exhibitions of the permanent collections but also a schedule of traveling or temporary presentations. Check the schedule for a variety of educational programs to help interpret the objects. Make a special point to visit places with exciting interactive areas. Here is a sampling of Alabama's museums to start your travels. Check the Alabama Museums Association web site (www.alabamamuseums.org), or Travel and Tourism (www.800alabama.com) for a more complete listing.

ART MUSEUMS

The Huntsville Museum of Art is located next to Big Spring Park where Mr. Hunt reportedly first settled and founded Huntsville. The Museum fills its seven galleries with a variety of exhibitions and provides educational art programs for children throughout the year. The Youth Art

Month exhibition and the Visual Arts Achievement Exhibition, held every spring, present works by students in grades kindergarten through 12 in North Alabama. These exhibitions provide an opportunity to see the best student work in a Museum setting.

A visit to The Birmingham Museum of Art, with over 23,000 objects in the permanent collection, including art of China, Japan, India, Korea, Africa, Europe, America, early and contemporary and Native American art from all over North America, will reinforce your understanding of how the art of the world overlaps and influences our rich culture. Sculpture surrounds the Museum



Photo courtesy of the Mobile Museum of Art

Discovering art through hands-on activities in ART Adventures at the Mobile Museum of Art.

building and is featured in the Museum's outdoor sculpture garden. Important to see are the second largest collection of Wedgwood outside of England and the Kress

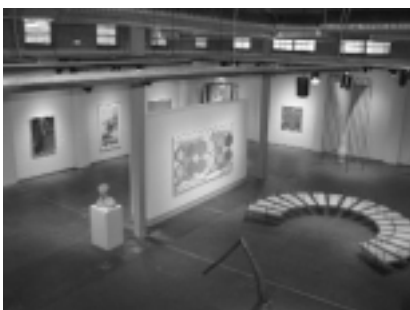


Photo courtesy of the Jule Collins Smith Museum

Alma Mater by William Baggett, 2003, oil on canvas, 36' x 18', in the auditorium, The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Art, Auburn University.

Collection of Renaissance Art. The Hess Education Gallery organizes hands-on, interactive presentations. *A Town of the Creek Nation* is a careful recreation of a Creek village from 1790. You will be able to experience how they lived and used the artifacts that we have in museums. Visitors to the "Town" can participate by making a pot, bead designs and dancing to music.

Photo courtesy of Space 301



Opening Exhibition Southern Current at Space 301 in Mobile.

In Tuscaloosa, the Westervelt-Warner Museum of American Art is located on a knoll overlooking Lake Tuscaloosa in the NorthRiver Yacht Club complex. It contains works collected over 40 years by Jack Warner, former CEO and chairman of Gulf States Paper. The collection centers on American art, largely from the period of the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, but includes 20th century works as well. Warner has said, "My concept of this was a family museum. When folks come to see this exhibit, they're going to feel America." In addition to works by Thomas Cole, John Singer Sargent, Andrew Wyeth and Georgia

O'Keefe, you can find furniture by Duncan Phyffe, silverware by Paul Revere and early American artifacts such as rifles and pistols.

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts is located in the Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park near the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. In addition to galleries featuring the permanent collection and traveling presentations, the ARTWORKS Gallery is a stimulating, artistically designed space with many interactive experiences. Activities are designed to interpret objects in the

permanent collection and use works commissioned from living artists. Among notable activities is a three-dimensional time line of art history with objects representing art from cave people to the present. The Tannenbaum Screen allows the visitor to become a kinetic work of art, moving in front of unusual colors and forms against the background art created by Ed Tannenbaum. The top level of the gallery allows younger visitors an unstructured art experience, bringing their own point of view to books, games and puzzles.



A tour of the Permanent Collection at the Mobile Museum of Art.

Photo courtesy of the Mobile Museum of Art

A three acre lake and formal gardens create the setting for Auburn's Jule Collins Smith Museum of Art. The entry reflecting pool showcases the sculpture *Spinoff* by Jean Woodham. A spectacular Dale Chihuly glass chandelier hangs in the foyer. Major items in the permanent collection include John James Audubon prints and what some say is the "art bargain of the century"—36 works of art by now famous twentieth century artists, purchased by Auburn University in 1948 for \$1,072.

Many unique educational activities await visitors to the Mobile Museum of Art. Begin with a series of sculptural pieces on the outside of building. At the front of the building is a piece by Alabama artist Bruce Larsen. Titled *Transformation*, the sculpture features a butterfly with a 20' wingspan built with found objects and attached to a 30' metal blade of grass. A lever system allows visitors to move the wings. Inside, a Museum Scavenger Hunt provides materials to help young viewers look at the Permanent Collection. The educational wing includes ART Adventures, a

Photo courtesy of the Jule Collins Smith Museum



Dale Chihuly, Amber Luster Chandelier, 2003, hand-blown glass, 17' x 7', in the entrance rotunda, of The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Art, Auburn University

state-of-the-art, interactive, hands-on gallery filled with creative and inventive learning stations: ART Theater,

ART Lab, and ART Stops. All these activities help children make a personal connection to art.

Searching in out of the way communities can lead to hidden treasures. Of special note, the Fayette Art Museum, located in the Civic Center, houses a broad collection of works by regional artists, with a focus on self-taught artists including Jimmy Lee Sudduth, Brother Ben Perkins, Sybil Gibson, Fred Webster and Louis Wilson. The Aliceville Museum presents works by World War II German prisoners of war who were housed at Camp Aliceville. Many of these men were artisans, and they painted, sketched and sculpted; made their own marionettes and wrote plays for them to perform; and built a 1000 seat amphitheater out of handmade bricks. One prisoner created a working violin out of matchsticks. When they returned to Germany, Aliceville became the repository for these art pieces.

EXPLORING ART CENTERS

Art Centers provide wide-ranging exhibitions and activities, but often do not hold extensive permanent collections. To see outstanding examples of contemporary, often cutting-edge art, visit Space One Eleven in Birmingham or Space 301 in Mobile. For

Photo courtesy of Barbara Broach, Florence Department Arts and Museums



Frank Lloyd Wright-Rosebaum House Museum, in Florence, Alabama.

changing exhibitions of state and regional artists, travel to the Tennessee Valley Art Center (Tuscumbia), Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts (Florence), Mary G. Hardin Cultural Arts Center (Gadsden), Heritage Hall (Talladega) and Eastern Shore Art Center (Fairhope). Check on college and university art galleries for other changing exhibitions. And for two very unique experiences, stop by the Kentuck Art Center in Northport where you can visit working artists studios or travel to York, a thriving artists community which showcases local artists as well as nationally-known artists-in-residence.

HISTORY MUSEUMS—WITH AN ART TOUCH

The Depot Museum in Fort Payne features items of local history, railroad memorabilia and rare blown glass “whimsies.” The Museum also includes an outstanding collection of Native American Indian pottery, basketry, weapons, tools and clothing. A truly unique folk art exhibit includes more than 90 dioramas, which are three-dimensional pictures, depicting fairy tales, historic events, wildlife scenes and other subjects. The pieces were hand crafted in 1913 and were originally part of a traveling medicine show.



Discussion at the Birmingham Museum of Art regarding the painting by American artist, Albert Bierstadt, entitled Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, Oil on Canvas, 1865.

Photo courtesy of Birmingham Museum of Art

The entry to The Farley L. and Germaine K. Berman Museum of World History in Anniston is an art gallery with paintings from many areas of the world. One painting, a Pre-Raphaelite, from the late 19th century is of a medieval maid and knight and sets the tone for much that you will see in rest of the Museum. Children's interactive galleries in the museum offer opportunities to try on Asian clothing and ferocious masks and to sniff spices from around the world. Exciting things to see are a diamond and ruby

encrusted scimitar (curved sword) from the ancient Middle East, embroidered and gold-braided uniforms from medieval times through the 20th century and, of course, armor—including a Greek helmet from 300 B.C. In all there are more than 7,000 pieces in the collection.

Sloss Furnaces National Historical Landmark in Birmingham is a 17-acre blast furnace plant where iron was made from 1882-1971. It is also an art center which attracts metal artists from around the world to make cast iron sculpture. Sloss

offers a variety of public activities that involve casting molten metal. The most popular activity, also presented at many of the state's art festivals, involves making a scratch block in a sand mold and then watching it cast into a metal tile.

In the Capital city of Montgomery, elements of art punctuate the historic Civil Rights sites and public buildings. The Capitol Building is one of the oldest in the Nation and was rebuilt in 1851 after a fire destroyed the original. Look up to the rotunda at the murals of Roderick MacKenzie and the decorative gilding and stained glass. The

other precious objects.

On the campus of Tuskegee Institute is the George Washington Carver Museum, operated by the National Park Service. George Washington Carver started college as an art student, the

only black student in his class at his college in Iowa. Although he decided that science might afford him a better living, he was a life-long artist and art collector. He was a painter, a potter and even designed clothing. One fascinating project that he undertook was creating house paint from natural plant materials. He advised what color to paint house trim, ceilings and walls by making large cards with complimentary colors to give out to interested people. The first Carver museum to open in Tuskegee was actually dedicated exclusively to his works of art. Unfortunately, the building burned in 1947 and destroyed much of his body of work. One important work that survived is Carver's painting of yucca plants that won an award at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. P.H. Polk photography is also in the Museum's collection.



Taking part in workshops at the Huntsville Museum of Art MUSEUM ACADEMY.

Photo courtesy of Huntsville Museum of Art



Photo courtesy of Huntsville Museum of Art

Students at the Huntsville Museum of Art MUSEUM ACADEMY take part in a variety of classes throughout the year.

Alabama Department of Archives and History nearby was the first state archives in the U.S. and it is the repository for many wonderful objects including a spectacular full-length portrait of William McIntosh, portraits of other famous Alabamians, early furniture of Alabama, the *Head of Christ* by Giuseppe Moretti plus

HOUSE MUSEUMS

The Wright-Rosenbaum house in Florence is the only Frank Lloyd Wright designed structure in Alabama. Completed in 1940 with an addition in 1948, the house is one of the earliest Usonian designs and has been called one of the purest examples of Wright's unique style. The house is constructed of cypress, glass and brick. Notable features are the flat roofs, large overhanging eaves and expanses of glass.

Important house museums are located in Demopolis. Gaineswood is on the National Register of Historic Places and is owned by the Alabama Historical Commission. The original owner, Nathan Bryan Whitfield, put many ingenious and innovative features into the architecture of the house. It has been compared to Monticello. Another house dating from early Alabama is

Bluff Hall, with early decorative arts, and Laird Cottage, given by Geneva Mercer's family to honor her life and art. For twenty-nine years, Geneva Mercer was the assistant to Giuseppe Moretti, creator of the Vulcan statue in Birmingham. Some of her art and that of Moretti can be seen at the Cottage.

The Smith-Harrison Museum (loosely called the George Washington Museum) is in Columbiana, in Shelby County. Many artifacts in the museum were once owned by George and Martha Washington or by their descendants.

There are wonderful portraits as well as unusual personal items of our first president and his wife. Many of the objects deal directly with the founding of our country. A walk down the 'Mayberry-like' Main Street of Columbiana will take you to the 1854 Jeffersonian Courthouse, home of the Shelby County Museum and Archives, where you will see 19th century clothing and textiles, Indian artifacts and photographs.

SPECIALIZED CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS

Specialized children's museums in Alabama offer a wide variety of educational experiences in science, history and art. Early Works in Huntsville offers a storytelling tree, musical instruments and building a house in the architecture area. McWane Center in Birmingham and Exploreum in Mobile have a primary science focus, but there are always art experiences as well. The front entrance of the Children's Hands On Museum (CHOM) in Tuscaloosa features a vivid yellow metal sculpture by artist-blacksmith Steve Davis.



Interior view of the interactive exhibition A Town of the Creek Nation, 1790 at the Birmingham Museum of Art.

Photo courtesy of Birmingham Museum of Art

The Children's Museum of the Shoals offers a variety of exhibits including "Artsploration." Their brochure mentions the Chinese Proverb, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand"—all good thoughts for Museum Art Trails adventures.

Georgine Clarke is the Visual Arts Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts and director of the Alabama Artists Gallery.

Miriam Fowler is Curator of Education for the Birmingham Museum of Art.



Photo courtesy of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts' ARWORKS Gallery is at the heart of the Museum's educational philosophy, containing more than 30 stations for children exploring art.

THE ALABAMA SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

by John Northrop

There's a joke urn on my desk, a Father's Day gift from my teenage son. Its label reads: "Ashes of Problem Students."

No school has less need of such an urn than the Alabama School of Fine Arts—we call it ASFA—where we are blessed with a hand-picked student body of creative and impassioned students. Every school has its problems, but at ASFA our problems are rarely the kids.

I have what may be the single best job in American public education. I work every day with energized students and adults who want (in many cases need) to be in our school, doing what they love. That's not true in all public schools in Alabama—or anywhere else, for that matter.

The human factor makes every school unique. However, ASFA is unique also by design. Think of us as a charter school, expressly created by a 1971 enabling act, with our own board of trustees, to provide tuition-free instruction to students in grades 7-12 from throughout Alabama. Students audition to enter the school in one of six specialty programs: creative writing, dance, math/science, music, theatre and visual arts.

We're in downtown Birmingham close to other major institutions of civilization, like the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Birmingham Public Library, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the McWane Science Center and the Sloss Furnaces Museum.

Much of our teaching and learning, especially in our specialty programs, is college level. We challenge our 350 students to perform beyond usual high school expectations. Regardless of specialty, they also have to meet the state's core curriculum requirements in English, social studies, math, science and foreign language. It all adds up to a long school day—typically 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., plus rehearsals—sometimes with some fairly intense pressure.

Our kids are the winners. For example, in 2004 our 59 seniors earned \$3.5 million in scholarship and grant

offers from 166 higher ed institutions—places like the Cooper Union, Brown, Berklee, the San Francisco Conservatory, Yale, Georgia Tech and many fine schools in Alabama. In 2003, our academic reputation hit the stratosphere when Newsweek magazine listed ASFA as the number four public high school in American, based on the number of advanced placement (AP) tests our students take.

Not that I put much stock in such rankings! At best, they tell only part of the story. AP tests show that

ASFA offers challenge and that our students rise to that challenge, but standardized tests can't show the intangibles, the unique blend of "personality traits" that set us apart from some other very good schools. When I think about ASFA's personality, here's what comes to mind: Joy. We want every student to find joy in learning, and we measure it.



Laramie Tyson, a senior from Gilbertown, and Sarah Jacks, a sophomore from Birmingham.

Photo courtesy of Alabama School of Fine Arts

Performance. Our students learn by doing, very often in front of live audiences. (Talk about tests!)

Depth. Most of our students spend at least three hours every day in their specialty work, exploring and learning in depth. By graduation, they grow far beyond the basics. They leave us with strong individual skills, perspective and confidence.

Choice. Through audition, our students choose ASFA and ASFA chooses them—but that's just the

Photo courtesy of Alabama School of Fine Arts



Alabama School of Fine Arts music rehearsal, bass section, from the left: Courtney Dye, Fairfield; Lia Walberg, Birmingham; and Robert Pugh, Leeds.

beginning. Getting and staying here is a privilege, not a right, earned daily through every choice a student makes.

Diversity. Our students come from a wide range of ethnic, economic and geographical backgrounds. They come with a rich mix of interests, points of view and ways of thinking that together offer extraordinary learning opportunities.

Respect. It's the key basic, the first big heading in our code of student conduct. If you come here without respect for other people and their interests, then you learn it. We expect our adults to set a high standard of respect in their dealings with one another and our students. Out of mutual respect comes a vibrant network of support. Our kids feel a strong sense of appreciation and belonging.

Connection. The extra time our students spend in class means more time with knowledgeable, caring adults. It also means, by the way, that we spend more per student than most other public schools.

Overall, what makes me most proud is that our school is a place where every kid can feel valued, secure, trusted and productive. Walk down our halls and you'll

find students sitting alone or in groups outside the direct view of teachers, actually working. And I often find myself in awe at what they achieve.

One example is the music department's production of Vivaldi's *Gloria* two years ago. Vivaldi wrote the piece for students in an 18th century girls' school. As befits church music, our choir and instrumentalists performed the piece in Birmingham's Cathedral Church of the Advent.

That day I took my seat knowing how hard the kids and teachers had worked to get there. For weeks, I had passed our recital hall and heard them going over and over one passage after another, mastering the liturgical Latin, sharpening their phrasing and building toward a perfect blend of voice and instrument. Finally, in a superb acoustical setting, the department's hard work paid off. The students sang

and played with confidence, precision and depth. From the opening "Gloria in Excelsis" through the closing "Cum Sancto Spiritu," I sat rapt, sometimes with my eyes closed, noting with wonder that our students' performance was more compelling than the professional recording I had at home.

I found myself snared in an odd web of emotion. On one hand, I felt a strong tug of pride in the kids for the great music they were giving us. At the same time, I felt a counter pull of humility, knowing that in my own distant past as a student musician, I never approached such on-stage polish and maturity. Overall, I felt simply grateful to find myself attached to a school where such beauty could flower.

Gloria? Glorious! As the last notes resonated in the church, the audience rose in a long, boisterous ovation, the kids beaming back at us. For neither the first time nor the last at an ASFA event, I wondered . . . was I the only adult with tears in his eyes?

Is ASFA for everyone? We field no sports and sponsor no clubs, as in most high schools. From time to time,

our kids' focused and sometimes peculiar interests earn them sideways looks and even mean-spirited epithets—for example, at least one suburban school counselor has called them "weird." Evidently, it's hard for some people to understand how any normal teenager might have something more in mind than just fitting in. I like what one parent recently said in an anonymous interview with an outside researcher:

I feel there is a section of children out there, and if they're not taken care of, the world's going to lose lots of talent and creativity—but they can't function in the regular mainstream. It's impossible.

I've had five children. I've never seen any of my children ever have the love and support that she had from the school. She loved it. Her whole high school experience was fabulous. It wasn't easy, I mean the whole thing was a struggle, but they never let her fall.

It was so important because she is such a fabulous kid. She just marches to a different drummer.

I mentioned at the outset that we have problems, but one of them these days is not the lack of public interest. We're particularly grateful for the legislature's continuing support. Without state funding there would be no ASFA. At the other end, private sector contributions to our non-profit ASFA Foundation enrich an already strong program and are chiefly responsible for the very roof over our heads.

Opened in 1993, our present facility, with subsequent improvements, stands in stark contrast to the ramshackle, makeshift quarters we inhabited for our first 20 years. However, even today's building provides less performance space, flexibility and comfort than you see in many ordinary high school auditoriums.



Students in the production of Arabian Nights. Sarah Jones of Vestavia Hills, Josh Butler of Leeds, and Brandi Burgess of Birmingham.

Photo courtesy of Alabama School of Fine Arts

ASFA is one of Alabama's finest educational jewels. I believe we've earned the chance to climb to a higher level, to grow from being very good to truly great! A year ago, the city of Birmingham pledged us nearly a half-block of vacant property near the school as the site for a proposed world-class performance center, now on the drawing board. We are at work devising a fund-raising plan that will touch all the bases—private sector, federal government, state and local government, and local and national foundations.

Our challenge and invitation to all will be to invest in a landmark facility that will allow our kids to push the boundaries even further, and to look their best doing it. At the same time, we'll lay the groundwork to expand our enrollment and offer the best in arts and science education to even more talented Alabama youngsters.

John Northrop is the Executive Director of Alabama School of Fine Arts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON ADMISSIONS TO THE
ALABAMA SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS,
CONTACT
JARONDA LITTLE
AT 205-252-9241,
OR JLITTLE@ASFA.K12.AL.US.

P U B L I C A R T M A G N E T S C H O O L S

Birmingham City Schools

Alabama School of Fine Arts
1800 8th Avenue North
Birmingham, AL 35203
205-252-9241
www.asfa.k12.al.us

Decatur City Schools

Gordon-Bibb Elementary School
211 Gordon Drive SE
Decatur, AL 35601
256-552-3056
www.ptc.dcs.edu/schools/elem/gb/gb.html

Benjamin Davis Elementary School
417 Monroe Drive NW
Decatur, AL 35601
256-552-3025

Huntsville City Schools

Academy for Academics and Arts
2800 Poplar Street NW
Huntsville, AL 35816
256-428-7600
www.hvs.k12.al.us/schools/magnet/aaa

Jefferson County Schools

Shades Valley Theatre Academy
6100 Old Leeds Road
Irondale, AL 35210
205-379-3300

Shades Valley Visual Arts and Communication Academy
6100 Old Leeds Road
Irondale, AL 35210
205-379-3300

Gardendale High School Art Academy
800 Main Street
Gardendale, AL 35071
205-379-3600

Mobile Public Schools

Old Shell Road Creative and Performing Art School
1706 Old Shell Road
Mobile, AL 36604
251-221-1557

Dunbar Creative and Performing Art School
500 Saint Anthony Street
Mobile, AL 36603
251-221-2160
dunbar.mcm.schoolinsites.com

LeFlore High School
700 Donald Street
Mobile, AL 36617
251-221-3125

Montgomery County Schools

Carver Elementary School
3100 Mobile Drive
Montgomery, AL 36108
334-269-3625

Baldwin Art and Academics Magnet
410 S McDonough Street
Montgomery, AL 36104
334-269-3618
www.baldwinjhs.mps.k12.al.us

Booker T Washington Magnet High School
632 S Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36104
334-269-3618
www.btwmhs.mps.k12.al.us

ALABAMA'S Art Camps FOR CHILDREN

To start sharing and discovering the arts with your child, look for art camps in your community. Most local art councils, art museums, art guilds, universities and colleges offer art education programming for a variety of ages. Following are several diverse examples.

THE ALABAMA BLUES PROJECT

By Rick Asherson

with special thanks to Debbie Bond and Sasha Reynolds-Neu

Imagine an arts program that gets kids excited and involved, builds self-esteem, allows them to discover talents and interests they didn't even know they had, teaches them history, celebrates diversity, develops their writing and public speaking skills, and gets them singing, dancing and playing music. Impressed? Well, you should be.

Blues in the Schools—commonly referred to as BITS—is one such innovative arts program that has been steadily growing in recognition and demand over the last twenty years. Blues education programs are now happening all over the



Photo by Alan Bernhardt

Alabama bluesman Willie King and Debbie Bond jamming with Blues Camp Children.

country, wherever sufficient local interest, creativity and passion for the blues can be found. One of the

many organizations providing BITS programs is the Alabama Blues Project (ABP). Founded in 1995 and based in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the ABP has a mission to preserve the blues as a traditional and contemporary art form. Their educational programs teach self-esteem, discipline, cross-cultural under-

standing, interaction, and teamwork within diverse groups. These programs are presented to a wide variety

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN

of audiences, and have been particularly effective with at-risk and troubled youth. Marquetta Lanier, an ABP student, says of the blues camp, "It teaches kids things they should know instead of being out on the streets. The program offers a safe place to go and learn something very positive." Adds Justin Bogan, "and gives them something constructive to do." The ABP programs have been the recipient of many awards including the Druid Arts Award from the Tuscaloosa Arts Council and the 2004 Keeping the Blues Alive Award for education programs from the Blues Foundation.

So, what does a blues education program look like? The ABP is presently in the middle of a twenty-three week after-school program and summertime blues camp, held every

Tuesday in a Tuscaloosa church hall. About forty children from foster homes, Boys and Girls clubs, and schools have chosen to enroll in this program. When they sign up, they choose which instrument they would like to learn—guitar, harmonica, drums or voice. Each group is given musical tuition by a professional blues musician. They then work toward a grand finale of performances which have included the Kentuck Arts Center, City Fest, the VA Hospital, and a local TV station.



Blues Camp children perform on Kip Tyners' Good Day Alabama.

Photo by Rick Asherson

This year's performance culminated in a blues extravaganza at the Diamond Theater in downtown Tuscaloosa.

Besides teaching hands-on musical instruction and blues history the ABP has developed a life-skills curriculum. This component is taught at each session by harmonica player and social worker J.K. Terrell. Legendary musicians like Willie King also make periodic visits with the young aspiring musicians and share their knowledge. They also jam and perform with the student band. This program is sponsored by the State Council on the Arts, The Children's Trust Fund of Alabama, Fender Guitar, Peavey Electronics, Mercedes Benz, Bonnie Raitt, Alligator Records and many individual donors.

Last year's public performance at the Tuscaloosa Library attracted a crowd of eighty enthusiastic friends,



Photo by Alan Crow

2004 Blues Camp Band

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN



Photo by Rick Asherson

Alabama Blues Camp children: Chris Morris and Justin Bogan.

relatives and blues fans. It was the biggest public children's event in the library's history. The two lead singers, 16-year-old Lakendrick and 11-year-old Marquette, fronted ten harmonica players, five guitarists, ten drummers, six singers and one bass player. The kids had the audience dancing and whooping, tapping their feet, and waving their hands in the air. "It makes me feel good to play the blues," says bass player Kim Bogan, "and it makes me feel happy."

The success of these performances is no mean feat. Consider how difficult it is to get thirty adults to create a successful performance, let alone thirty kids between age eight and sixteen, many of them without any previous musical experience and many of them at-risk or troubled. Teaching musical skills is

the easy part. A successful performance demands tremendous focus, concentration and attention; listening, cooperating and responding to others; being interested in creating a community event which unites all the performers and the audience in one big musical celebration.

The ABP blues education programs come in a variety of formats, designed to suit different needs and budgets. One presentation that is increasingly in demand is a one-hour class in the history of the blues, featuring a full blues band, a guest Alabama blues musician, and plenty of audience participation. The ABP has presented these workshops to schools, festivals and libraries throughout the Southeast. Titled "An Introduction to the Blues," this program traces the story of the blues

from its African roots to contemporary blues. Students learn how rock and roll, jazz, rap, hip-hop and other international musical forms all find their roots in the blues. With audiences of up to seven hundred, this whirlwind tour through the history of the music, and the history of America, is a foot-tapping, hand-clapping learning experience. As another blues camp student, Chad Carlile, puts it, "Music is important because its fun. I like the way we blend blues with everyday lessons. It can make a big difference."

Another popular program offered by the ABP is its artist-in-residency classes. One or more artists work with the school to integrate the story and emotional power of the blues into the regular school curriculum. These full-time residencies typically last for four to six weeks, and provide a range of different learning experiences that allow for a powerful, in-depth exploration of the blues, embracing music, art, creative writing and history. These residencies culminate in a Blues Extravaganza, where the students stage a musical performance for their school, and also create an exhibition of the art and creative writing they have produced as part of the program.

It is part of the ABP's mission to preserve and celebrate the incredibly rich heritage of Alabama blues, a heritage which includes such blues greats as W. C. Handy, Dinah Washington, and Big Mamma Thornton. ABP is now home to

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN

many outstanding blues musicians, including three-time W. C. Handy award nominee Willie King. Indeed, all its educational programs feature important, often under-recognized, Alabama blues artists, who are eager to share their music and talk about their life in the blues. To further promote contemporary Alabama blues, they also present blues showcases, where Eddie Kirkland, Willie King, Wild Child Butler, Jerry "Boogie" McCain, Big Bo McGee, Little Jimmy Reed, and many other musicians have been featured. Looking to the future, the organization is hoping to establish a cultural arts center and archive. It will include an open space for exhibitions, education, rehearsal and per-



Alabama Blues Camp at Covenant Presbyterian Church.

formances. This facility will be a valuable resource for preserving and promoting Alabama blues.

American blues music is powerful, emotional music created by African-Americans to help transcend suffering under the hardship of sharecropping and the racist Jim Crow South. It is a music that continues to speak to all races, all ages, and all

nationalities and a cultural gift that underlies all forms of modern popular music. Teaching the story of the blues takes the student from Africa to America, from slavery to sharecropping; it follows the great migration from the rural South to the industrialized North, from simple country juke joints to Carnegie Hall. It is a cultural tradition that can give self-respect and self-esteem to its performers, and help us all weather the storms of life with grace and dignity.

Debbie Bond is the Founding Director of the Alabama Blues Project, an organization dedicated to the preservation of blues music as a traditional American art form.

ASF CAMP *Shakespeare*

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time." (Macbeth, V, v, 19)

For children enrolled in the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Camp Shakespeare, a week-long day camp for students ages 10-12, time doesn't "creep," it flies! In one week's time, camp participants weave a full-scale production of an abridged Shakespearean

play, complete with lights, costume, dance, and song.

On the first day of camp, children read through the script and are cast in their roles. They also attend classes in stage combat, dance, technical theatre, and vocal training.



Chris Mixon (left) directs 2004 Camp Shakespeare.

Photo courtesy of Alabama Shakespeare Festival

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN

The second day, the director leads them through the text, helping them enjoy the playfulness of a pun or the motivation of a character, and blocking begins. In combat class, students practice techniques for simulating a convincing stage fight punctuated with moans and grimaces, sometimes parrying with foam "weapons." The movement teacher choreographs dances for soldiers celebrating a victory or for witches frolicking around a cauldron. Some students rehearse songs—a love song, a dirge—that will help establish the mood of a scene, while others design their own costumes, part of the technical theatre class that includes learning stage blood recipes or seeing how a fog machine works.

On the fifth day, the students perform to a packed house at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. That shy camper from the first day has become an ambitious Lady Macbeth, a cunning mistress of persuasive language sweeping across the stage with poise.

Instructors for the program are drawn from ASF's professional staff. Chris Mixon, widely loved as Puck in ASF's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has been Camp Shakespeare's artistic director/acting teacher for four years. Mixon vividly recalls the young girl he cast as Juliet in 2003: "Juliet has a terrifying confrontation with her father, who threatens to cast her out if she doesn't follow his orders to marry Paris.

Then Nurse, her only confidante, tells her she should obey her father and reject Romeo, whom she has already secretly married. This is the moment in which Juliet decides to risk everything and run off to find Romeo or face death. She lies to Nurse and implies that she will do her father's bidding, but the audience must know--or suspect--that she's lying. So you have the powerful scene with her father, then the desperate scene with the nurse, then this wonderful moment of calm understanding which this young actress performed kneeling and facing straight out to the audience, when she simply responds to Nurse: 'Tell my parents that I am gone to Friar Laurence's cell/To make confession and to be absolved.' And the entire audience *knew* that this play was going to be very tragic from this point on. I did little more than show her where to be on stage and

suggest to her that the audience should know Juliet is lying. Everything else was performed instinctively by this young actress,



Shakespeare camper crafts an original eye mask.



Shakespeare camper paints costume and mask designs.

Photo courtesy of Alabama Shakespeare Festival

Photo courtesy of Alabama Shakespeare Festival

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN

and it was a very powerful performance indeed."

Matt Dickson, ASF shop foreman, has taught the technical components in the Camp since its founding in 1989. Its original goal was to expose students to all of the elements of the theatre that contribute to an effective production and to help students develop the discipline required for the creative process. Initially, the Campers wrote their own production, but since 1995, emphasis has been placed on Shakespeare. Directors at ASF often turn to this pool of skilled young

actors when casting children's roles.

The Camp has now become a model for theatres nationwide that wish not only to build future audiences but also to nurture a genuine love for and understanding of the most insightful playwright of all time. Linda Dean, ASF's director of education, notes that many of the stu-

dents enroll in the camp for three summers.

By the time they are twelve they will have read and performed three Shakespearean plays, an accomplishment very few adults can match!

Linda Henry Dean is the Director of Education at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, President of Board of Alabama Writers' Forum, and Secretary of Shakespeare Theatre Association of America.



Photo courtesy of Alabama Shakespeare Festival

Daryl Foster (kneeling) choreographs dance sequence for Camp Shakespeare's Macbeth.



Photo courtesy of Alabama Shakespeare Festival

Shakespeare camper uses stencils to create painted designs on costumes.

Camp dates 2005:
July 25-29, 2005 and
August 1-5, 2005
Time: 8:30 am – 4:00 pm daily
Number of students per session: 50
Ages: 10 – 12
Tuition: \$255
Instructional areas: Acting, stage combat, dance, technical theatre, vocal training
Audition required: None
Scholarships: Yes
Contact person: Linda Dean, Director of Education

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN

KIMBROUGH'S CAMP: A BITE OF THE "BIG APPLE" IN THE RURAL DEEP SOUTH

by Dee Ann Campbell

The lights go down inside the theatre. The curtain is pulled, the music begins, and the makeup-clad face of a young girl beams at her audience as she belts out a song in Broadway style. Her voice is superb, her acting flawless. And the audience is thrilled.

It's not New York. It's not Hollywood. It's Gilbertown.

crowds come, it doesn't look like the Deep South at all. It looks like a little slice of the 'Big Apple'.

Inside the small secluded theatre that stands in a field that was once his grandfather's farm, former Broadway star Fred Kimbrough and his wife, former Lithuanian ballet dancer, Svetlana Visily, have been giving local children a little bite of

that apple for the past several years. Through the Kimbroughs' Ballet and Theatre Performing Arts School (BTAPS), children have discovered hidden talents in dance, gymnastics, vocals, and drama. And behind the walls of

lives to bringing theatre arts to the children in Fred's hometown.

"When you see the faces of these children attending their first ballet class or working on a scene from a play," says Fred. "you know that this is the real value of the arts. These kinds of programs will steer our youth away from drugs and alcohol and into a productive and happy life."

But their work with children doesn't stay within the walls of their theatre. The Kimbroughs also pro-

Photo courtesy of Ballet and Theatre Arts Performing Company



BTAPS students performing Little Orphan Annie for a Gilbertown audience.

Tucked away in the small town in southern Choctaw County, along a rough and winding backroad that leads to what was once fields of corn and cotton, is something unexpected, something incredibly rare for the rural Deep South. On the outside, the small building looks like nothing unusual. But when the doors open, when the lights go on and the

their little theatre, the Kimbroughs have produced, directed, and choreographed Broadway-style musicals, with local kids as the stars.

Although their careers once took them to New York, with all the glitz and glamour of the 'Big Stage', Fred and Svetlana have dedicated their



Fred Kimbrough working with a child from the Summer Enrichment Program.

Photo courtesy of Ballet and Theatre Arts Performing Company

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN



Photo courtesy of Ballet and Theatre Arts Performing Company

Fred Kimbrough with students during a summer workshop.

vide summer workshops in theatre arts as part of the Summer Enrichment Program of the Choctaw County Learning Center. The cost-free program is held at area schools for 6 weeks during the summer to offer students a boost in their regular school-year studies, as well as an opportunity to participate in the arts. The Kimbroughs provide workshops twice a week during the program at each of the participating schools.

In an effort to reach children who might otherwise not be able to afford classes at the theatre, they have organized the 'Adopt a Child through the Arts' program, a scholarship program through which children are brought by bus to the theatre for classes at no cost to the child.

"This program is the backbone of what we are trying to do in this rural area," explains Fred. "Since 1997, we have become more and more committed to this outreach."

With a professionalism that accepts nothing less than a child's best effort, the Kimbroughs expect hard work and dedication from their students. And they get it.

The children who are taught drama, dance, gymnastics, and theatre performance through the Kimbroughs' programs are quick to say that their demands are more than worth it. And the audiences who view their performances adamantly agree, as do the parents of the kids who have learned to love the arts through their tutelage.

Because of their dedication to children, the Kimbroughs have been instrumental in helping hundreds of area students develop a love for theatre. Their work through their theatre and through programs like Summer Enrichment has enabled children, many of whom might never have been exposed to theatre arts, to discover hidden talents, to find their niche in the world of theatre, and to take their own bite of the 'Big Apple.'

*Dee Ann Campbell
is the Features Editor
for the Choctaw Sun
in Gilbertown.*



Photo courtesy of Ballet and Theatre Arts Performing Company

Svetlana Kimbrough working with a student.

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN

ART CAMP FOR KIDS IN **TALLADEGA**

by Laura Nation

There was a void in the community, and former art teacher, Tommy Moorehead, felt a responsibility to fill it. Children in Talladega Schools, like many others in Alabama, didn't get much professional art training in school, and Moorehead knew it mattered. Since starting Arts Camp for kids in Talladega in 1990, more than 2,000 youngsters between the ages of 6 and 14 have learned to draw and paint, to make pottery and sculpture and have learned how dance and music combine to become expression. The city of about 18,000 supports its own art and history museum, Heritage Hall. Hired by the museum in 1990 as education director and now serving as Director, Moorehead saw an opportunity to reach out to the children.

"We wanted to provide a new educational opportunity in the community," Moorehead said, sitting in his basement office at the museum. Found object sculptures of wire and other bits of material hang from the office ceiling, twisted into human-like shapes, a reminder of the year self-taught artist Lonnie Holley led a workshop for Arts Camp. There's a sculpture by Birmingham artist Frank Fleming sitting on a windowsill, and paintings by assorted Alabama artists hang here and there. The museum keeps a focus on Alabama artists, which is maintained through its Arts Camp approach as well. Newspaper clippings from various museum events

hang on a bulletin board, several relating Arts Camp activities from year to year. It was really a duty, Moorehead says, for the museum to find a way to provide the opportunity for children.



Photo courtesy of Heritage Hall, Talladega

A visual art project by Heritage Hall Art Camp students.

Heritage Hall's Arts Camp has been self-supporting since it began, Moorehead said, largely due to continued high enrollment. For the past six years, Arts Camp has been structured into two sessions, averaging about 90 children per session. "We didn't want the classes to be so large it took away from the quality we offered," Moorehead said. Children are organized into four groups, and rotate through the instruction areas during camp. There's also a built in

"swim time," since the recreation center offers a pool. Children bring their lunch and snacks, and can buy drinks at the center.

Each year, in addition to the artists hired to teach the various sessions, professional artists in dance, music, drawing or painting and in other areas are brought in to give demonstrations and conduct workshops for Arts Camp. This adds to the overall exposure the children receive, Moorehead said. Birmingham percussionist Jesse Frazier has visited Arts Camp, and constructed an outdoor hanging assortment of things that can make sounds—be it the muffler from an old motorcycle or a plain metal bucket. Frazier also had standing drums of various types, along with an array of objects that can be used as "drumsticks." The children experimented with gentle and strong strikes, and then took part in performing an improvisational piece of music.

Moorehead said he likes to include both a creative approach to teaching art and the more traditional approach of teaching art history and traditional art techniques. "This is because children learn in different ways," he said. "Half the kids will be more receptive to distinct direction and instruction. Others will be more responsive to freedom of expression and exploration." From the beginning, the concept of Arts Camp in Talladega has been designed to include both philosophies, he said.

ALABAMA'S *Art Camps* FOR CHILDREN

"We try and combine both so the children are allowed to be creative, but also learn technique," Moorehead said. "And this not only goes for the visual, but for dance and the other areas."

In addition to the activities designed for small group instruction, Arts Camp has a larger overall project each year that in which the children have a hand. Since 1995, Artist Russell Everett has led the children in producing large assemblages, and when they're completed, are given to the community to enhance public buildings. There are projects in place in the city's five elementary schools, along with the Spring Street Recreation Center. All the projects have a theme, Moorehead said. The first year, the children produced a montage of all the activities that take place at the recreation center. It hangs in the two-story foyer. The second year, "we had a very ambitious project," Moorehead says. The result was a 40-foot long visual history of Talladega County, showing the original Creek Indians who inhabited the area, the city of Talladega's Historic District, Cheaha State Park, DeSoto Caverns and other elements.

Children in Arts Camp became part of a national arts effort in 2002. A design had been approved by the Arts Project on Millennium Trails for a sculptured archway to be placed at the beginning of the Pinhoti Trail in Talladega National Forest. Two stone



Visual art created by students at Heritage Hall Children's Art Camp.

Arts Camp is also an outlet for professional artists to work and have impact in young people's lives, Moorehead said, basing his belief in the importance of artistic expression for children in research. "For many years now, it has been accepted that learning to put abstract thought on

paper is critical to the process of learning, whether it's reading, math, or learning to play a musical instrument," he said. Usually, between the ages of 4 and 5 to 6 years old, children make the connection. Many children never get that, not being exposed to drawing or just coloring with crayons before going to school. Drawing and painting encourage the development of the process of putting abstract thoughts on paper. There are also decision-making skills used in drawing and painting that carry over to other areas of learning. "Every time they decide on a color, even what to draw, they're gaining experience in making decisions," Moorehead said. "These activities add up for later learning situations they face." Just as important is the concept of having a fuller life from exposure and experience in the arts. "Appreciation of beauty is a learned concept. It even carries over into environmental beauty, and all the things that make life richer. We like to hope we're encouraging these qualities for the children, as well."

Laura Nation is Features Editor for The Daily Home in Talladega.

N U R T U R I N G

THE ART PATRONS OF THE FUTURE

by Terry Schrimmscher

If you grew up in Birmingham, there is a good chance that you have enjoyed a play at Birmingham Children's Theatre. In fact, many current audience members experience their first live theatre in the same manner as their parents and grandparents. BCT, as it is known,

state and the nation. In recent years, Theatre-in-Motion, the touring division of BCT, has performed to nearly 100,000 people a season, bringing a bit of Alabama to cities like Louisville, Tampa, and Ft. Lauderdale on a regular basis. BCT

has performed as far north as Boston and traveled as far west as Houston in previous seasons. In the 1980's, BCT was invited to perform an original production, *Backstage Baby!*, at the prestigious Kennedy Center in Washington DC. However, the goal of Birmingham Children's Theatre is to reach every county in Alabama, even as out-of-state tours continue to expand. Last season, BCT reached 56 of

Plays at Birmingham Children's Theatre are based on classic literature found on current school reading lists. Some selections are more contemporary, but all are evaluated based on script quality and a positive message. BCT seeks to promote literacy through each play as the actors bring the stories to life - making cumbersome stories easier to understand. By selecting plays that are both educational and entertaining, children from a variety of backgrounds are exposed to an opportunity to develop a life-long interest in the arts. Audiences at BCT are comprised of home school students, day care classes, private and public schools, and families.

Birmingham Children's Theatre began its 58th season in July with an eye on new audiences. For the first time, the theatre added a summer production aimed at day care and family audiences. To celebrate Black History Month, BCT



Photo by Terry Schrimmscher

Birmingham Children's Theatre's Mainstage production of Heidi.

was founded in 1947 as a service project of the Junior League of Birmingham as a way to introduce arts education through live theatre to students in the city. Originally, actors would visit schools to perform sketches for students. Since then, BCT has grown to manage a three-theatre complex in Birmingham where it performs more than 300 performances a season for more than 200,000 people—making BCT one of America's largest theatres for youth.

Despite having a home theatre, the organization has expanded upon its original mission by reaching beyond Birmingham through tour performances to cities around the

the state's 67 counties through Theatre-in-Motion or school field trips to one of the BCT theatres in Birmingham. In the past, various organizations have sponsored tours to areas of the state that might not have been able to see professional live theatre otherwise. Expansion into new areas takes much time and planning. Theatre-in-Motion tours are booked as much as a year in advance and each set must be adaptable to fit a variety of venues from local theatres and community centers to school gymnasiums.



Photo by Terry Schrimmscher

Dorothy and friends set out to see the Wizard.

will host guest artists from New York, The Ishangi Family African Dancers, to introduce students of all ages to African folk dance and the story telling tradition. To close the season, BCT will spotlight the Spanish-speaking community with a Mainstage adaptation of Munro Leaf's classic tale of *Ferdinand the Bull*. Theatre-in-Motion has tentative dates set for a first appearance in New Jersey as well.

The remainder of the 2004-2005 season will feature adaptations of three classic tales for pre-school



Willy Wonka, Charlie Bucket and an Oompa Loompa on the Birmingham Children's Theatre's Mainstage

Photo by Terry Schrimsher

Best Christmas Pageant Ever for audiences of all ages.

The schedule for each production features a Saturday matinee in Birmingham for family audiences. Generally, each play runs twice a day for several weeks, but many schools do not attend every production. By scheduling family days throughout the season, students can still see any play that interests them and parents have an affordable option for entertainment that is more family-friendly than a

day at the movies.

BCT sets aside one day of each production for a sign language interpreter. Whenever possible, BCT provides free performances to Children's Hospital, local shelters, and other organizations that serve the community. In fact, much of the theatre's grant-

related funding is used to provide performances for audiences who could not attend without assistance. Thus, BCT is always seeking new sources of revenue and innovative ways to reach new audiences. Thanks to school audiences in Alabama, most of the income for Birmingham Children's Theatre is earned through ticket sales, as it has been for 58 years. Each summer, as part of its mission to serve education, BCT conducts a series of acting workshops known as The Academy of Performing Arts.

Designed for students between the ages of seven and fourteen, the workshops teach all aspects of theatre for the beginner to the aspiring professional. The courses have been such a success that the organization hopes to begin workshops and acting classes as part of its schedule all year. Birmingham Children's Theatre is more than a destination in Birmingham. It is one of the only full time professional theatres in the state and one of the few professional theatres in the entire country dedicated to youth audiences. Although BCT is not unique, it is rare. Most cities in America do not have a professional theatre for youth at all. If you ask any member of the BCT staff, they will tell you that they are proud to serve Alabama. Most importantly, they are proud to represent Alabama to the rest of the country.

Terry Schrimsher is Director of Public Relations for Birmingham Children's Theatre.



Photo by Terry Schrimsher

Holiday festivities in the Birmingham Children's Theatre's Wee Folks theatre.

through first grade audiences written exclusively for BCT. The Mainstage will feature a Russian tale that mixes theatre and ballet, and a classic fable from Denmark for students from kindergarten to sixth grade. In December, BCT will present the contemporary holiday favorite *The*

PERFORMING ARTS VENUES FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

ETOWAH COUNTY

MARY G. HARDIN CENTER FOR CULTURAL ARTS
Corner of 5th and Broad Street
Downtown Gadsden, AL
Contact: Bobby Welch
PO Box 1507
Gadsden, AL 35902-1507
Voice: 256/543-2787 ext 26
Fax: 256/546-7435
bobwelch@culturalarts.org
www.culturalarts.org

Over 5,000 square feet of changing exhibit space, features a dozen art exhibits annually. Hands-on activities and interactive exhibits are featured in Imagination Place, located adjacent to the Hardin Center for Cultural Arts. The Center is home to the Gadsden Community School for the Arts which offers private instruction in visual arts, dance and music to more than 300 students each week. The Center offers a series of concerts and live music every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, May through October. The nationally acclaimed Etowah Youth Orchestras is also based out of the Hardin Center. The EYO also operates a three-week summer string camp that takes place during June each year.

JEFFERSON COUNTY

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alicecox@alabamaballet.org
www.alabamaballet.org

Under the artistic direction of Wes Chapman, this company of 41 professional dancers presents four full-length productions each year. Outreach and education include CityDance, Chance to Dance and Dance Discovery Workshops. Alabama Ballet School provides artistically,

developmentally and physically appropriate dance training for students ages four through adult.



Photo courtesy of the Alys Stephens Center

ALABAMA JAZZ HALL OF FAME
Contact: Dr. Frank E. Adams, Sr.
1631 4th Ave. North
Birmingham, AL 35203
Voice: 205/254-2731
Fax: 205/254-2785
FAdams@jazzhall.com
www.jazzhall.com\jazz\

The Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame makes its home in the historic Carver Theatre for the Performing Arts. The museum honors great jazz artists with ties to the state of Alabama. Exhibits convey the accomplishments of the likes of Nat King Cole, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton and Erskine Hawkins and the music that made them famous. Visitors travel from the beginnings of boogie woogie with Clarence "Pinetop" Smith to the jazz space journeys of Sun Ra and His Intergalactic Space Arkestra.



Photo courtesy of the Alys Stephens Center

ALABAMA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Contact: Dr. Frank Blanton
 3621 6th Avenue S
 Birmingham, AL 35222
 Voice: 205/251-6929
 Fax: 205/251-6840
fblanton@alabamasymphony.com
www.alabamasymphony.com
 (Click on Young People's Concerts)

Young People's Concerts are presented at the Briarwood Presbyterian Church and the BJCC Concert Hall and are tailored for specific age groups. Teachers are encouraged to bring their classes, and parents their children. Concerts are offered Fall, Winter and Spring.

ALYS ROBINSON STEPHENS

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
 Contact: Melvia Walton
 1530 3rd Avenue South
 Birmingham, AL 35294
 Voice: (205) 975-9540
 Fax: (205) 975-2341
mwalton@uab.edu
www.allysstephens.org

The Arts Education program offers optimal benefits to students and educators alike. The ARTS IN ACTION education and outreach program includes: Preludes; ASC Kids' Club Series; Meet the Artist Series; Martin Hames Arts Mentoring Program; and Teacher Workshops.

BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Contact: Vivian Lyle
 2130 Richard Arrington, Jr. Blvd,
 North
 Birmingham, AL 35203
 Voice: 205/458-8196
 Fax: 205/458-8895
vivian@bct123.org
www.bct123.org

As one of the premiere theatres for youth and family audiences in the United States, Birmingham Children's Theatre prides itself on setting the standard for quality professional productions that are enjoyed by more than 300,000 patrons each season. Performances take place at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center.

CHILDREN'S DANCE FOUNDATION

Contact: Diane Litsey
 1715 27th Court South
 Birmingham, AL 35209
 Voice: 205/870-0073
 Fax: 205/870-1301
Diane@ChildrensDanceFoundation.org
www.mindspring.com/~mcdcf/home.htm

CDF's work includes a studio program, an extensive educational outreach program which serves typical, special needs and at-risk children, two school performance programs which tour state-wide, creative workspace for community artists and arts organizations, and creative educator and parent resources.



Photo courtesy of the Birmingham Children's Theatre

OPERA BIRMINGHAM

Contact: Yvonne Henderson
 1807 Third Avenue North
 Birmingham, AL 35203
 Voice: 205-322-6737
 Fax: 205-322-6206
Yvonne@bhammusiccoop.org
www.operabirmingham.org

Sets, costumes, professional singers and an accompanist will come to your school as part of Opera Birmingham's rapidly expanding education program in our community.

They will tell a story through music and introduce children to the magic of opera. Study guides related to classroom subjects are provided to teachers in advance of the performance and may be copied for student use.

MADISON COUNTY

FANTASY PLAYHOUSE

Contact: Karen Alexander
3312 Long Ave
Huntsville, AL 35805
Voice: 256/539-6829
Fax: 256/539-6835
fpacademy@aol.com
<http://www.letthemagicbegin.org/>

Fantasy Playhouse has provided live theatre for children for 43 years. Three productions plus A Christmas Carol are performed annually at the Von Braun Center. A professional staff of teachers and administrators offer affordable, year-round, personalized instruction in the dramatic arts for preschool children, K-12 and adults. The Fantasy Playhouse Academy of Theatre offers a safe and nurturing environment for students to come, to learn, to be exposed to live theater, to be challenged to perform and to expand their horizons.

HUNTSVILLE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Contact: Dorcas Harris
PO Box 2400
Huntsville, AL 35804
Voice: 256/539-4818
Fax: 256/539-4819
hso@hiwaay.net
www.hso.org

The Huntsville Symphony Orchestra performs four youth concerts each year at the Von Braun Center Concert Hall for fourth grade field trips. The Symphony School provides professional quality music instruction in orchestral strings. It strives to remove obstacles to learning and encourages the public and private schools in North Alabama to establish music instruction programs. Programs include semi-private and private lessons and after-school classes in orchestral strings, and class instruction in the public schools. Students may be as young as three.



Photo courtesy of the Alys Stephens Center

MOBILE COUNTY

MOBILE SYMPHONY

Contact: Sarah Wright
257 Dauphin Street
Mobile, AL 36652-3127
Voice: 251/432-2064
Fax: 251/432-6618
mail@mobilesymphony.org
www.mobilesymphony.org

Mobile Symphony offers five instructional programs for children, including the Youth Orchestra and Bay Area String Community Orchestra. In-School Chamber Concerts provide a quartet of Symphony musicians to area schools and

Young People's Concerts are performed four times per year especially for K-5 students. Sneak Preview Dress Rehearsals make the final rehearsal for each MSO concert open to the public so families can enjoy the symphony together.

MOBILE BALLET INC.

Contact: Winthrop Corey
4351 Downtowner Loop N
Mobile, AL 36609
Voice: 251/342-2241
Fax: 251/343-8289
marie@mobileballet.org
www.mobileballet.org

Mobile Ballet offers dance education for students age three and older and serves more than 10,000 school students annually through the Discover Dance Series. Several special student performances of The Nutcracker and at least one other production are presented each season. Mobile Ballet will also introduce in spring 2005 a special Carnival of Dance for children, showcasing shorter, child-friendly ballets and arts-oriented activities.

MOBILE OPERA

Contact: Michele Kitson
257 Dauphin Street
Mobile, AL 36602
Voice: 251-432-6772
Fax: 251-431-7613
mkitson@mobileopera.org
www.mobileopera.org

Mobile Opera offers educational opportunities from scholarships to school performances each year. From providing docent programs to Teen Night at the Opera and the Young people's Student Matinee performances, to free InSchool Arts Education Programs celebrating Black History Month and our Annual Spring tour that serves 50,000 students a year within Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

ALABAMA DANCE THEATRE

Contact: Kitty Seale
Armory Learning Arts Center
1018 Madison Ave.
Montgomery, AL 36104
Voice: 334/241-2590 Fax: (334) 241-2504
ADTDance1@aol.com
www.alabamadancetheatre.com

ADT's school performances include intermission chats with the Artistic Director and guest artists as well as education packets to help teachers prepare their classes for their performance experience. Additional components of ADT's Education Outreach Program include teaching after school dance classes for educationally at risk students, a badge program for South Central Alabama Girl Scouts and a ticket endowment program providing tickets for many deserving community groups. Over the past 17 years, 60,000 students have attended ADT's school performances.

MONTGOMERY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Contact: Helen Steineker
PO Box 1864
Montgomery, AL 36102
Voice: 334/240-4004
Fax: 334/240-4034
www.montgomerysymphony.org

MSO provides two free annual Children's Concerts for sixth graders at the Davis Theatre in downtown Montgomery. Broadway under the Stars and their performances at Jubilee CityFest are family events. The Symphony League hosts the Montgomery Youth Orchestra. MSO also mounts Stringfellows, a music camp for junior high string players and free string lessons through the Trawick Players.

THE MONTGOMERY BALLET

Contact: Priscilla Crommelin-Ball
6009 East Shirley Lane

Montgomery, AL 36117
Voice: 334/409-0522
Fax: 334/409-2311
montgomeryballet@yahoo.com
www.montgomeryballet.com

The Montgomery Ballet offers over 1500 classes annually for students age 2 through adult. As many as five Linking Education and Arts Productions (LEAP) are offered for students K-college at greatly discounted ticket prices. Other offerings include "Premiere Performances" each February, annual holiday production of The Nutcracker, and "Ballet and the Beasts" at the Montgomery Zoo.



Photo courtesy of the Alabama Dance Theatre

ALABAMA SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Contact: Linda Dean
1 Festival Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117-4605
Voice: 334/271-5337
Fax: 334/271-5438
asfmail@mindspring.com
www.asf.net

"Serving as an educational resource" has been part of ASF's mission statement since 1985. Programs supporting this mission include the following: Camp Shakespeare (grades 4-

6) a multi-arts summer daycamp which culminates in a performance of a Shakespearean play on an ASF stage; the Summer Shakespeare Intensive for High School Students (grades 9-12), text interpretation and performance of famous scenes from selected Shakespearean plays; ASF Academy (grades 3-adult), weekly classes which include scene and monologue study, improvisation, vocal and movement exercises, technical theatre instruction. Camps and classes are taught by ASF actors and production technicians, professional dancers and vocalists, and certified stage combat instructors.

MORGAN COUNTY



Photo courtesy of the Alabama Dance Theatre

PRINCESS THEATRE
Contact: Lindy Ashwander
112 Second Avenue NE
Decatur, AL 35601
Voice: 256/350-1745
Fax: 256/350-1712
lindy@princesstheatre.org
www.princesstheatre.org

The Princess Theatre serves as an arts in education resource for schools in north Alabama. In partnership with various schools including Decatur City Schools, Hartselle City Schools and Morgan County Schools, the Princess offers many opportunities in arts education that enrich the

school curriculum and expand students' understanding and appreciation of the arts. Programs include a Young Audience Professional Series for elementary schools, school matinees, artists residency activities, on-site classroom visits by artists, and discount tickets for students and teachers. Teachers have opportunities to broaden their teaching skills and learn how to use the arts in the classroom. The Princess Theatre also provides outreach programs in arts education to youth organizations.

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY

TUSCALOOSA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Contact: Leslie Poss
PO Box 20001
Tuscaloosa, AL 35402-0001
Voice: 205/752-5515
Fax: 205/345-2787
tso@tsoononline.org
www.tsoononline.org

TSO offers a free concert to all Tuscaloosa County 5th graders. The Symphony Petting Zoo and brass and woodwind ensembles are available for school presentations.

ALABAMA BLUES PROJECT INC.
Contact: Debbie Bond
2620 2nd St E
Tuscaloosa, AL 35404
Voice: 205/554-1795
Fax: 205/554-1915
comonbond@aol.com
www.alabamablues.org

The Alabama Blues Project offers a wide range of innovative blues education programs featuring well-known Alabama blues musicians like Willie King, Little Lee, Little Jimmy Reed and more. Programs range from one time, one hour interactive performances to long-term school residencies and after-school programs targeting elementary through high school students as well as at-risk students.

When planning art activities for your children and family, we encourage you to visit the Department of Tourism and Travel's website at
www.800alabama.com
"2007 - Year of the Arts"



PLAY ENVIRONMENTS: **FERTILE GROUND FOR FUN AND FANTASY**

by Jessica Armstrong

Sliding and spinning, running and hiding, skipping and jumping, throwing a ball or splashing on a hot day. Children need a place that stimulates their young minds and bodies. Play is a fundamental joy of childhood that involves contemplation as well as action; children also welcome a serene place to daydream and imagine. Research has found that playgrounds are vital to physical and mental strength, allowing youngsters to develop social, emotional and cognitive skills.

Children need different play opportunities to complete their social, intellectual and physical needs, experts believe. The ideal play area addresses all aspects of development, says Tom Jambor, who taught early childhood development at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and is a leader in outdoor play environment design. Children need a safe and stimulating environment to burn off excess energy, and to balance their mental and physical selves, he notes.

Safety is the first factor to consider when determining the quality of a playground, he explains. Safety features should include a resilient fall zone to soften tumbles. The play environment should also be free of barriers and protrusions, and provide open space to run and a place where adults can supervise. Fear of litigation and stricter safety codes have hindered the imagination of playground designers, admits Jambor. His idea of the perfect playground is free of equipment—a place where children must rely solely on the wonders of nature.

Generations of children have enjoyed the traditional playground that features a slide, swing, see-saw and other basic equipment. Some environmental designers believe that this traditional type of playground—while effective for burning off energy and stimulating physical growth—doesn't provide for cognitive and social play. A popular alternative today is the contemporary type playground, designed by connecting different pieces that form a continuous piece known as the superstructure or multi-functional structure.



The centrally located observation gazebo provides views for supervision to all areas of the play environment. A manufactured composite play structure is shown in the background.

Photo by Linda Ruth

Moveable parts such as old tires, railroad ties, crates and other materials are characteristic of the adventure/creative type playground. Children enjoy manipulating things and seeing how they work, and this need is satisfied in such a setting. Designer's say playgrounds should be created to give children the opportunity to create their own environment.

That's what Linda Ruth, assis-



View from handicap accessible sandbox to Bankshot Basketball goals.

Photo by Linda Ruth

tant professor of building science at Auburn University and author of *Design Standards for Children's Environments*, believes should be the goal when planning a play environment. The ideal playground, she says, contains different zones for dramatic play, sand play, water play and hard surface play with balls. Additionally, it should offer a natural element, along with quiet places and social spaces to share with friends.

"The challenge is that each time a child comes to the playground, they get a different experience," explains Ruth. "They bring with them their own sense of play."

A different type of playground is being constructed nationwide and in Alabama. The Boundless Playgrounds project was started to provide the opportunity to children with and without disabilities to play side-by-side. More than five million children in the United States have some type of disability that makes it difficult or impossible for them to enjoy conventional playgrounds. The primary aim is to remove all architectural barriers and allow children to play without having to abandon their special equipment and crawl onto the play area. In Montgomery, a boundless playground in Vaughn Road Park was funded by a grant from Alabama District Kiwanis International. The organization has also funded a boundless playground in Sheffield and at Langan Park in Mobile. Boundless playgrounds offer greater accessibility than the minimal requirements set by the ADA.

At a time when children are increasingly sedentary—a result in part to the ever-expanding array of electronic games—playgrounds provide an antidote to virtual and passive play. Ruth designed a playground at Auburn's Cary Woods Elementary School that beckons children with its playhouses and replica of Alabama's state capitol rotunda.

"It has columns and one of their favorite games is to pretend it's a jail," adds Ruth, clearly pleased that the playground is fueling their imagination. Undoubtedly for a play environment designer, there's no greater endorsement than a group of delighted children.

Jessica Armstrong is a freelance writer living in Auburn, who has written for a number of newspapers and magazines nationwide. In addition to her writing, she teaches journalism at Auburn University, where she is also working on a master's degree in communication.

A FEW OF THE STATES TOP PLAYGROUNDS

Homewood Central Park, Central Avenue and Oxmoor Road, Homewood. Features a skateboard area, amphitheater, a re-routed creek and a common green for games.

Hickory Dickory Park, 1400 Hickory Lane, Auburn. A focal point of this large wooden multi-structure is a replica of the town's landmark Toomer's Corner.

Wilson Morgan Park, Beltline Road, Decatur. This adventure type playground offers a variety of interactive activities, including sand and water play.

A. L. Freeman Park, 3001 18th Street, Tuscaloosa. In addition to traditional equipment, children can scale rock walls, explore the inside of tubes and climb loop ladders.

Tom Bradford Park, Edwards Lake Road, Birmingham. Three large multi-structure play areas and climbing nets, overlooking a lake.

Pratt Park, Doster Street and Doster Road, Prattville. Features "A Child's Place" playground with colorful towers that resemble a fairy-tale medieval village.

Bowers Park, 2101 Bowers Park Drive, Tuscaloosa. Three large multi-structure play units, a tree climber and giant board games.

Delano Park, Decatur. The town's oldest city park, with a playground in a picturesque setting that includes a rose garden and a tree canopy of mature hardwoods.

Vaughn Road Park, 3620 Vaughn Road, Montgomery. Features one of the state's first Boundless playgrounds that offer full access to children with disabilities.

Brahan Spring Park, 500 Drake Avenue, Huntsville. Large, fully equipped playground overlooks a spring where children can fish.

ALABAMA AUTHORS FOR CHILDREN

by Joan Nist and Judith Lechner

Books are the means by which children not only develop the most basic human skill of communication but also see the world open to them beyond their immediate surroundings. Too often in our modern noisy blurred-hurried lives, these surroundings include the stereotyped commercial sources of TV-film, video-DVD, and Internet.

Authors for children create poems, stories, and nonfiction which give readers—or in the earliest ages, listeners—pleasurable and well-developed tales rather than simplistic or didactic “examples”. Through good books, from nursery to adoles-

acters whose actions and thoughts help children gain understanding of human motivations and the possibilities for thought and action.

Alabama has many writers who have created works for young audiences. As children grow, they prefer to read about protagonists their own age. This does not mean that books about children are always for children. Alabama's most celebrated author, for instance, created *To Kill a Mockingbird* for an adult audience. In United States high schools, according to the National Council of Teachers of English, this work by Harper Lee is one of the novels most often assigned to young adults.

On the preschoolers' level, parents and nurseries often begin with *Mother Goose*, those rollicking rhythmic rhymes which are a centuries-old heritage from Britain to all English-speaking children. Alabama now has Father Goose, aka Charles Ghigna. A recognized serious poet for adults, “Pa Goose” (his e-mail moniker) has also created books of humorous poems for children. One of these, *Riddle Rhymes*, is like a game to be played between reader and listener: the lines of each verse lead up to the riddle's answer at the end.

Other preschool books have been both written and illustrated by Cindy Wheeler. She created her adventurous mischievous cat Marmelade while an art student at Auburn University. The large-letter, brief-sentence text acquaints the pre-reader with the look of words,



Kathryn Tucker Windham entertaining children at the Homewood Public Library.

Photo courtesy of The Alabama Writers' Forum



Photo courtesy of the Selma-Dallas County Public Library

Already enjoying a book before it is checked out.

cence, we develop the ability to understand and appreciate oral and written language, for these books serve as models for language growth. They also provide memorable char-

while her artwork focuses on main features; especially yellow-orange Marmelade (the only complicated word) while the background is suggested by simple black lines.

Both Ghigna's and Wheeler's works are in the format of picture books. By definition, these books present the story through both the words of the text and the accompanying pictures. Author and artist are storytellers, each developing the tale in their medium. The writer recounts a simple plot with appealing characters, while the illustrator complements the text with visual creativity within the narrative constraints.

Often artists speak of the process as similar to staging a play or portraying events like a film. Others have said that picture book art functions like the cave paintings of pre-

literate man or the stained glass windows of cathedrals, visual narratives for illiterate medieval folk. For children, picture books are a sensory synthesis of sight, sound, and story read aloud to and with them.

One of the prominent artists for children's books who has an Alabama connection is Barry Moser, who has used woodcuts and watercolors to portray figures and characters in works from the Bible and Brer Rabbit to Jules Verne and Truman Capote's acclaimed holiday memoirs.

The publisher rather than the author selects most of the artists for picture books. In one instance, this impersonal decision has led to cross-country friendship, as Faye Gibbons, a prominent Alabama writer for

exchanged family visits. Thus in their next book, *Mama and Me and the Model T*, Rand depicts glimpses of the Gibbons' Deatsville homestead and even includes the family dogs.

These two humorous books are examples of how a simple story can also convey to youngsters a sense of other times and places. A recent study has compared students' response to history accounts in textbooks with historical fiction, including picture books. The stories, having characters with whom readers can identify, showed better retention of background historical information than the generic textbooks.

Even celebrities have tried their skill at picture books. Jimmy Buffett created the Caribbean-folkloric *The Jolly Mon* with the help of his young daughter co-author. Of course a guitar plays a prominent role, and there's a song score at the end.

Another prominent Alabamian, best known for adult novels and a "Crazy" film, is Mark Childress. After two Joshua books, he

wrote in humorous verse that *Henry Bobbity Is Missing* and *It's All Billy Bobbity's Fault*. In this classic about

brotherly squabbling, his magic realism is effectively and appropriately used.

Like other fantasy picture books, *Henry Bobbity*...stretches children's imaginations and helps them grown beyond here-and-now bounds. It may spark creative ability, which, if nourished, is important not only for future artists and writers but also for scientists, seeking to solve problems. Imagination breaks through the bounds and bonds of paradigms.

An Alabama author of both picture books and chapter books (for readers from the early grades on) has received one of the country's prestigious prizes. Angela Johnson has been given a MacArthur Fellowship. Among her picture books are *When I Am Old with You*, ideal for grandparents to read to children, and *Tell Me a Story, Mama*, a favorite with literacy organizations. Several of her chapter books refer to Alabama, including the Coretta Scott King Award novel *Toning the Sweep*, where the Southern setting includes an explanation of the title's meaning.

Like other regions of the South, Alabama is rich in folklore. An author who has provided numerous picture book folktales is Nancy



Story reading at the Selma-Dallas County Public Library.

Photo courtesy of the Selma-Dallas County Public Library

Photo courtesy of the Selma-Dallas County Public Library



Just for fun, a program at the Selma-Dallas County Public Library.

young people, found. Ted Rand, an artist from the Northwest, after illustrating Gibbons' *Mountain Wedding*,

Van Laan. One favored by storytellers is her cumulative, foot-stompin', audience-joinin' *Possum Come a-Knockin'*. Her *With a Whoop an' a Holler* is a lively collection of folktales, rhymes, and sayings, accompanied by illustrations by another Southerner, Scott Cook.

William Miller, not African-American himself, has written several picture books about incidents in the lives of leading African-Americans like Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright. One of his fiction books, which happened to coincide with the fame of Tiger Woods, is *Night Golf*, which depicts previous segregation—and also hope—in this sport.

A prolific author of over one hundred titles is James Haskins, born in Alabama. His works are nonfiction, and topics range from *Snow Sculpture and Ice Carving* to *Werewolves*. Most of his chapter books are about fellow African Americans, either singly—Bill Cosby—or in groups: *Outward Dreams: Black Inventors and Their Inventions*. The last-named book introduces, among other creative people, “the real McCoy”, an older contemporary of George Washington Carver.

Nonfiction informational books present a topic in more depth than mass-market textbooks can, and they treat specialized subjects omitted in general texts because of space. Biographies for children, too, main-

tain standards of accuracy and verifiable information. While the subjects are often role models, writers present an authentic picture (with maybe a few warts) rather than a sanitized ideal.

As young people move into the silent self-reading of chapter books from the picture book level, Alabama has given them writers whose presentations are as effective in person as in print. The multitalented Kathryn Tucker Windham—storyteller, photographer, ghost-biographer—thought that she wrote about her resident ghost Jeffrey and other spirits for adults. But children have taken him and the others for their own, learning some history, regional geog-

A PARTIAL LISTING OF LIBRARIES WITH SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

Ashland City Library
11 Second Avenue, North
Ashland, Alabama 36251
Contact: Tina Nolen
256-354-3427

B. B. Comer Memorial Library
314 North Broadway Avenue
Sylacauga, Alabama 35150
www.sylacauga.net/library
Contact: Tracey Thomas
256-249-0961

Homewood Public Library
1721 Oxmoor Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35209
www.homewood.lib.al.us
Contact: Edith Harwell
205-332-6637

Huntsville Madison County
Public Library
915 Monroe Street
Huntsville, Alabama 35801
(All library branches in
Huntsville offer programs)
www.hpl.lib.al.us
Contact: Kathryn Dilworth
256-532-5950

Montgomery City
County Public Library
245 High Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36104
(All library branches in
Montgomery offer programs)
www.mccpl.lib.al.us
Contact: Joan Means
334-240-4300 or 334-240-4984

Rainbow City Public Library
3702 Rainbow Drive
Rainbow City, Alabama 35906
www.rbclibrary.org
Contact: Tina Brooks
256-442-8477

Selma Dallas County
Public Library
1103 Selma Avenue
Selma, Alabama 36701
www.selmalibrary.org
Contact: Becky Nichols
334-874-1725

Tuscaloosa Public Library
1801 Jack Warner Parkway
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35401
Contact: Nancy Pack
205-345-5820, ext. 204
www.tuscaloosa-library.org



Seeing and hearing Rumpelstiltskin come to life.

raphy, and folklore along with a few supernatural shivers.

Aileen Kilgore Henderson, like Kathryn Windham, has written throughout a lifetime of varied experiences, in Henderson's case from World War II WAC to Texas Tenderfoot Teacher. Her first work for mid-grade children was *Summer of the Bonepile Monster*, which draws from her Alabama childhood, and her latest, *Hard Times for Jake Smith*, is set in Depression-era Alabama.

Faye Gibbons has written fictional chapter books as well as picture books, and she recently inaugurated a series of biographies published in Alabama. These are studies of explorer Hernando De Soto and of Horace King, the freed slave who built many of Alabama's lattice covered bridges in the mid-19th century. Both biographies have supporting illustrations.

Henderson's *Summer* includes some black and white illustrations, a rarity in fiction chapter books, as publishers seek to cut costs. Many readers, however, especially those who have enjoyed the variety of an art portfolio of picture books in their younger years, say that they now want to "think" their own pictures.

Some object to any movie, which is not visually faithful to the book.

Teens are moving toward adulthood, developing concerns for their own future

roles and responsibilities and showing interest in broader social issues.

.Books for them reinforce societal values without being didactic. Themes of novels give readers support for qualities of courage and kindness, patience and perseverance without moralizing. We remember stories better than admonitions.

Two Alabama authors have earned national recognition writing for young adults. Dennis Covington wrote the novel *Lizard* drawing from his own teaching experience. Developing the novel into a play was a challenge, Covington has said, creating it anew in dramatic form. The play was featured not only at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival but also at the Atlanta Olympics.

Han Nolan is recipient of the National Book Award, a most prestigious U.S. literary prize. Her *Send Me Down a Miracle* was a finalist in 1996. Dothan, with her family connections there, served as model for the town in the book. In 1997, *Dancing on the Edge* received the Award. In it, Nolan uses her own background in dance education.

Alabama authors have given children in the state and nation a fine variety of works to enhance

their visual and verbal sensibility.

From nursery to high school, this brief account has noted only a few of these writers. Other recent books include those by Tony Earley, Deborah Wiles, and Betsy Hearne. There is continued appreciation for earlier stories of Alabama's Native American heritage by Margaret Searcy and Virginia Pounds Brown.

One of the best places to find all these works is in our public libraries. Children often make up a majority of library patrons. From small towns to major cities, programs for young people are varied and full of creative activities: drawing pictures, story acting, writing, and exploring sciences.

From the books they meet in their local library, children will go into a larger environment, of talking toys, personified machines, children of other times and places, problems and possibilities. And many of those books, which open doors to a wider world, have been given to them by Alabama authors.

Joan Nist is Professor Emerita of Children's Literature at Auburn University.

Judith Lechner is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology at Auburn University where she teaches Children's Literature and other information science courses.